Case Study: Hate Speech

Hate speech is any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.

Hate speech can be a “precursor” to spikes in violence and large-scale human rights violations and can also create barriers to the right to participate in political and public life, or in economic and social spheres, and limit space for peacebuilding.

PBF-supported work to counter these trends has contributed to early warning and conflict prevention in a range of contexts. In addition, programming to counter hate speech has been pioneering hybrid or digital peacebuilding, combining online or virtual detection and dialogue tools with traditional peacebuilding.

Projects: PBF-supported work on countering hate speech has contributed to:

- Monitoring and countering hate speech that might contribute to electoral violence, including contributions to early warning and prevention platforms.
- Addressing the vulnerability of some youth to hate speech, as well as their potential to be positive “change-agents” in relation to hate speech.
- Responding to the way that hate speech links with or can exacerbate ethnic, religious or political divisions and strife.
- Developing strategies to respond to gender-based hate speech, and how prevention and protection of online targeting contribute to broader work on women’s empowerment.

Examined 12 projects for $30.16 million spanning 15 countries and territories.

Total PBF investment in counter-hate speech work between 2017-2022: $58.2 million through 24 projects across 24 contexts.

1. The majority of the projects examined focused on efforts to track, monitor, and otherwise counter hate speech, with only one project focusing substantially on disinformation, and none substantially focused on misinformation. For this reason, the case study within the Thematic Review generically refers to these projects as ‘counter hate speech’ efforts, rather than repeating all three terms in each instance.

2. The hate speech case study projects were implemented by: UNFPA, UN Women, Search for Common Ground (Côte d’Ivoire, PBF/CIV/D1); UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO (Côte d’Ivoire, PBF/CIV/D1); UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO (The Gambia, PBF/GMB/D-2); UN Women, ILO, UNODC (Guatemala PBF/IRF-307); UNDP and OHCHR (Kenya, PBF/IRF-453); IOM, OHCHR, UNDP (Liberia, PBF/IRF-482); OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP (Moldova, PBF/IRF-481); Christian Aid Ireland (Myanmar, PBF/IRF-338); UNESCO and UNDP (Myanmar, PBF/IRF-367); UNICEF and UNDP (Sierra Leone, PBF/SLE/B-11); UNICEF and UNDP (Sri Lanka, PBF/IRF-427); UNFPA, UN Women, UNDP, UNESCO (Western Balkans, PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479).

3. Kenya (PBF/IRF-453); Sierra Leone (PBF/SLE/B-11); Liberia (PBF/IRF-482); Myanmar (PBF/IRF-367); Côte d’Ivoire (PBF/CIV/D1); The Gambia (PBF/GMB/D-2).

4. Côte d’Ivoire (PBF/CIV/D1); The Gambia (PBF/GMB/D-2); Myanmar (PBF/IRF-338); Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479).

5. Sri Lanka (PBF/IRF-427); Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479); Kenya (PBF/IRF-453); Moldova (PBF/IRF-481).

6. Liberia (PBF/IRF-482); Sri Lanka (PBF/IRF-427); Guatemala (PBF/IRF-307); Western Balkans (PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479).
Integrating hate speech programming initiatives with larger national strategies and prevention platforms ensures that monitoring of hate speech can contribute effectively to early warning systems and help mitigate or prevent election-related violence.

Consideration for “toxic” masculinities can also be an important part of tackling gender-based hate speech and other contributors to poor social cohesion.

Collaboration and consultation with human rights experts in the design of any technological tools is crucial for ensuring that monitoring tools incorporate sufficient human rights safeguards.

Integrating counter-hate speech programming into broader gender equality and women’s empowerment as well as gender-based violence programming strategies fully captures the range of barriers and threats that might prevent women’s participation, updating women’s protection and prevention strategies for the 21st century.

Combining hate speech-focused interventions with traditional peacebuilding approaches aimed at defusing root causes of tensions, encouraging resilience and social cohesion, can lead to more durable outcomes.

To read the full case study, please visit PBF website
un.org/peacebuilding/content/human_rights_and_peacebuilding_TR